



**By Elder
Quentin L. Cook**

Of the Quorum
of the Twelve
Apostles

Sidebars by
Church historians
Kate Holbrook and
Matt Grow

Church History

A SOURCE OF STRENGTH AND INSPIRATION

In this article, from a worldwide devotional held at Nauvoo, Illinois, on September 9, 2018, Elder Quentin L. Cook and Church historians Kate Holbrook and Matt Grow answer questions about Church history posed by young adults from throughout the world.

Elder Cook: Church history can be a significant source of faith, but for some people, it has been misunderstood or overlooked. Some people have even purposely misrepresented stories of the past to sow doubt.

In learning *credible* history of the Church, we will bind our hearts together with the Saints of yesterday and today. We will find examples of imperfect people like you and me who went forward with faith and allowed God to work through them to accomplish His work. I promise that studying the history of the Church can deepen your faith and desire to live the gospel more fully.

RIGHT: PHOTOGRAPH OF WOMAN FROM GETTY IMAGES; FAR RIGHT: ADDISON PRATT AND HIS JOURNAL, FRENCH POLYNESIA, 1844

As we learn more about the Saints of the past, we will be strengthened in fulfilling our own mission as a daughter or a son of God.

The story of the Restoration is a story of sacrifice, determination, and faith. We are all part of the Restoration and Church history. Each of us has a mission to accomplish in this life that will help the gospel to fill the earth. As we learn more about the Saints of the past, we will be strengthened in fulfilling our own mission as a daughter or a son of God.

In the over 24 years that I have served as a General Authority, the desire of the Brethren has been to be as transparent as possible, both in terms of Church history and in doctrine. We feel that the effort to put forth new resources—particularly *The Joseph Smith Papers*, the Gospel Topics Essays, Church History Topics, and now the multi-volume *Saints*¹—is a wonderful way of getting people to study things in context that are true and that will help them

understand the gospel of Jesus Christ in a credible way.

One of my favorite accounts in *Saints* is the story of Addison Pratt going to the South Pacific. He had about 60 baptisms. My wife, Mary, and I had a chance to visit the Austral Islands, French Polynesia, where Addison Pratt taught.

One of the most remarkable experiences I've ever had was to hear a young woman there say, "I am a seventh-generation member of the Church." Addison Pratt had baptized her distant ancestor before the Saints went to Utah.

Wherever you are in this world, whatever lineage you come from, you're important, you're part of Church history. We very much need you and want you. You will bless people's lives.



Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon

When I was in my teenage years, we thought that my older brother wouldn't get to serve a mission because the ward was allowed to send only one young man at a time on a mission. Everybody else had to be available for the military draft. But our bishop and stake president found out that they could send one more. So, they talked to my brother about it, and he came home and told my parents.

My father was a wonderful man, but he was not active in the Church. His response was negative—but for an unusual reason. He wasn't critical of the Church or even of a mission, but my brother was preparing for medical school. My father said, "You've prepared yourself to go to medical school. You've

Why isn't the Church more open about some of the controversial things in its history?

By Kate Holbrook

When I was four years old, my mother and my grandmother worked at the Beehive House, Brigham Young's old house in Salt Lake City, Utah. They taught me all about Brigham Young and that he had many wives. About 10 years later, I learned that Joseph Smith had many wives. I didn't learn about seer stones, which Joseph used to help translate the Book of Mormon, until I was an adult. The Church did not hide information from me, but the historical information was not as emphasized when I was young.

What I did learn in my Sunday meetings and my seminary classes was what the main work of the Church is. I learned to repent. I learned to bring my life into harmony with the gospel of Jesus Christ. I learned how to establish a relationship with my Father in Heaven. These are the things in my life that I hold most dear. I know that for some people, it can be really painful to learn about something you

thought you should have known but didn't know. That's why Matt and I do the work we do. We hope that that experience for people will now become a part of the past because we have the book *Saints*, which portrays a full history for people.



How do we know if a source about Church history is reliable?

By Matt Grow

I've worked for the Church for the past nine years writing about history. I've seen the attitude of our General Authorities with relationship to our history. The conversations are not about "How do we hide or censor history?" Rather, the conversations are about "How do we make history accessible, available, and understandable?"

We all know that the challenge in the information age is not to find answers—we're surrounded by answers—but to discern between good answers and bad answers, good information and bad information. There are so many discussions online about our history, and most of these discussions produce a lot more heat than light.

Be careful about sources of information that just seek to tear people down. Look instead for sources of information that are based on the records left by the people themselves and that seek to be fair to them. It is really easy to play "gotcha" with the past, to pull a quotation or an incident out of context and make it look alarming.

As a historian, I try to follow the advice of a British novelist. He said: "The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there" (L. P. Hartley, *The Go-Between* [1953], prologue). That means when we visit the past, we don't want to be an "ugly tourist." We want to try to understand people within their own context and their own culture. We want to be patient with what we perceive as their faults. We want to be humble about the limits of our own knowledge. And we want to have a spirit of charity about the past.



taken the classes. You can do more good if you go to medical school than you can if you go on a mission."

That evening, this faithful, wonderful brother of mine sat with me, and the two of us talked. We concluded that there were really three questions that would determine his response to our father. The first one was, "Was Jesus Christ the Savior of the world?" The second one was, "Is the Book of Mormon the word of God?" And the third one was, "Was Joseph Smith a prophet?" I realized that the answers to those three questions would affect almost every decision I would make for the rest of my life.

I had always loved the Savior and I had read the Book of Mormon, but realizing how significant those answers were, I prayed that night and received through the Holy Ghost a profound favorable answer to those questions. Jesus Christ is the Savior, the Book of Mormon is the word of God, and Joseph Smith was a prophet. I testify that these things are true.

Plural Marriage

I want to make three points about plural marriage. First, it's clear that there was a lot of sacrifice in plural marriages. There was a lot of love and unity, but there was also sacrifice, and parents in those marriages taught their children to sacrifice. Many of the children of those plural marriages took the gospel of Jesus Christ across the world and blessed many lives.

Second, there were some, such as Vilate Kimball, who received their own personal revelation—before they even knew fully about what was coming—that this doctrine came from God.²

And third, in the senior councils of the Church, there's a feeling that plural marriage, as it was practiced, served its purpose. We should honor those Saints, but that purpose has been accomplished.

Now, there are unanswered questions. But I want you to know that we have a loving Heavenly Father who has a perfect plan, that His plan is one of happiness, and that we have a Savior who did everything for us. We can trust in Them.

Why are the accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision a little different?

By Matt Grow

Joseph Smith recorded or asked his scribes to record four different accounts of the First Vision. The accounts tell a consistent story, but there are differences. That shouldn't surprise us. If there were complete uniformity among the accounts, that's when I, as a historian, would become suspicious because that's just not the way memory works. We see the same pattern in other accounts in history or in the scriptures (see Acts 9:7; 22:9).

Also keep in mind how hard it is to capture a sacred experience in language. Joseph called language a "little, narrow prison" (in *History of the Church*, 1:299). Think about your own most sacred experiences. How easy is it to put them into words? We should celebrate that we have multiple accounts because they give us new insight and new perspective. Go read the four accounts of the First Vision in the Gospel Topics essays. Doing so will deepen your appreciation of what happened that day.

What role did the Urim and Thummim play in the translation of the Book of Mormon?

By Kate Holbrook

Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon by the gift and power of God. The Urim and Thummim, mentioned in the Book of Mormon, was buried with the plates. When Moroni gave Joseph the gold plates, he also gave him the Urim and Thummim. The seer stone, which Joseph also used to translate, was not buried with the plates. It was something that Joseph had found on his own years earlier that helped him to feel in tune with spiritual revelation. So he used both.

Emma Smith, one of his scribes, later remembered that whenever Joseph sat down to start translating again, he wouldn't ask, "Now, where was I? Where did we leave off?" He would just start right at the point where they had left off. If you look at a page of Joseph Smith's personal journal that he wrote three years after translating the Book of Mormon, it's full of crossed-out words, incomplete thoughts, and broken sentences. When you look at a page of the dictated Book of Mormon, there's none of that. It's complete, beautiful prose—complete sentences, nothing crossed out.

That is all interesting to think about, but what matters to me more is the contents of the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon is where King Benjamin taught me to prioritize generosity over judgment, where Alma taught me what it means when I get baptized, what I promise to do for and with my fellow Saints. The Book of Mormon is where Mormon and Moroni taught me about how important charity is and what to do to obtain it. This book has shaped who I am and how I see the world.





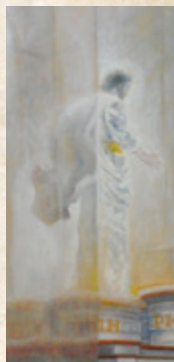
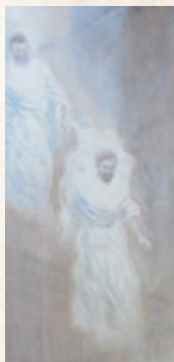
Why did they practice plural marriage in the early days of the Church?

By Kate Holbrook

Book of Mormon instruction about plural marriage says that monogamy is the Lord’s wish for His people, but there are rare exceptions when He commands the practice of plural marriage to raise up a righteous people (see Jacob 2:30). This is the rare exception that Joseph Smith was commanded to instigate. Joseph dragged his heels for years to implement this practice, but eventually he did implement it because he wanted to be obedient to God’s commandment to him. He tried to practice plural marriage in the middle of the 1830s, but it was really in 1841 that he slowly, more officially, began to introduce the practice to his trusted associates. They were shocked. They pled in prayer with their Father in Heaven for understanding of this principle, and they received personal spiritual witnesses that it was right for them at that time.

Plural marriage, practiced officially for about 50 years, was something people could choose. Scholars are still trying to determine how many adult Latter-day Saints actually were in plural marriages, but we know that it was generally a minority of the Saints. And we know that many of them were the most devout, stalwart members of our Church. In 1890, President Wilford Woodruff (1807–98) issued a manifesto that was to end the practice of plural marriage. When some people heard this manifesto, they were relieved. Plural marriage had been hard for them. When others heard this manifesto, they were devastated. They had sacrificed so much, and they had testimonies of this principle.

Some Church members wonder what our past practice of plural marriage means for the afterlife. Church leaders have taught that plural marriage is not necessary for exaltation or for eternal glory. Although I’m personally grateful that monogamy is the rule and that plural marriage is the exception, I do not discount the testimonies and honorable obedience of our spiritual ancestors who practiced this principle. They were being obedient, and they had a testimony that it was right.



Temple and Covenants

In Kirtland, Ohio, one of the incredible things that happened was the building and dedication of the Kirtland Temple. The dedicatory prayer, which Joseph received by revelation, appears in the 109th section of the Doctrine and Covenants. In that prayer he asked the Lord to accept the Saints’ workmanship and sacrifice in building the temple.

One week after the dedication of the temple, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery had another vision. This occurred on Easter, which was also Passover. The Lord came in vision and accepted the house. He told the Saints that they should rejoice for having, “with their might, built this house to my name” (Doctrine and Covenants 110:6). After that vision closed, three ancient prophets appeared: Moses, who restored the keys for the gathering of Israel from the four parts of the earth; Elias, who committed the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham; and Elijah, who restored the keys of the sealing power (see Doctrine and Covenants 110:11–16).

The restoration of those keys was absolutely essential to accomplishing the Lord’s purposes. We needed not only the Book of Mormon but also those keys and temple ordinances. Those keys have never been more important than they are now.

I have noticed that when one of the Twelve Apostles is called as the prophet, his heart turns toward the ordinances of the temple in a dramatic way. I was privileged to be at the dedication of the Nauvoo Illinois Temple with President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008). I

ABOVE: KIRTLAND TEMPLE BY AL ROUNDS; RIGHT: MOSES, ELIAS, AND ELIJAH, BY GARY ERNEST SMITH

remember how deeply touched he was to have this temple built and how important it was to him to bring temples to the Saints. President Thomas S. Monson (1927–2018) continued that effort and received the same inspiration from heaven that President Hinckley did. And we have seen that inspiration in a dramatic fashion with President Russell M. Nelson. The mantle of prophet has come upon him, and he has had an increased sense of the preciousness of temple ordinances.

One of his first messages as President of the Church was to encourage people to go to the temple, receive their ordinances, and stay on the covenant path. Right after that, he said that if for any reason you have fallen off the covenant path, get back on that path.³

How did temple work bless the early Latter-day Saints?

By Matt Grow

When Joseph Smith died, the walls of the Nauvoo Temple were less than halfway done, and soon it became apparent to President Brigham Young (1801–77) that the Saints would again be driven out. So he asked the Lord: “Should we stay here and finish the temple, knowing that we will have to abandon it almost as soon as it’s done, or should we go now?” The answer came clearly, “Stay” (see Brigham Young diary, Jan. 24, 1845, Church Archives; Ronald K. Esplin, “Fire in His Bones,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1993, 46). The ordinances of the endowment and of sealing were so important that the Saints needed to stay.

And so for the next year, they poured all they had into the temple. Toward the end, their homes were being burned around Nauvoo, and the Saints were preparing to go west just as they were finishing the temple. In December 1845, enough of the temple was completed that the Saints could dedicate part of it, give endowments to those who were worthy, and seal husbands and wives to each other.

Over the next few months, they worked around the clock to prepare everyone spiritually for the great trek west. To me it’s profound and sacred that I am sealed by that same power to my wife, children, parents, and generations who have gone before and generations yet unborn. That is what the Restoration has made possible.

Can you share an event from the Restoration that has strengthened your testimony?

By Kate Holbrook

I remember the story of Emma Smith trying to escape the persecution in Missouri. The Mississippi River was only partially frozen—not enough that a wagon with people and their possessions could travel on it. It is a wide river, and it was dangerous to cross. Emma had a six-year-old child holding onto one side of her skirt, an eight-year-old on the other side, a two-year-old in this arm, and an infant in that arm.

The sister-in-law of one of Joseph’s scribes had sewn cotton bags that buttoned around the waist. In those bags under her skirt, Emma carried the only copy of Joseph’s translation of the Bible, which he had been working on for months. With the documents and with her children, she took one step after another across that frozen river, hoping she wouldn’t fall in.

To me, that is the consummate signal of courage and faith—that when you need to do something for what you believe, you just move forward, one foot in front of the other.





“Be of Good Cheer”

Many of you have trials and tribulations. Some of that comes because there is agency. Some of that comes because there is an adversary. But you need to know that we have a loving Father in Heaven and that the Atonement of Jesus Christ can bless us in ways we perhaps don't fully understand.

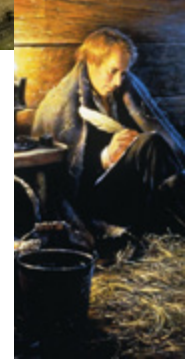
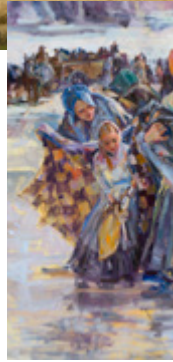
Some historians say that the number of Saints who escaped from Missouri to Nauvoo during the winter of 1838–39 was as high as 8,000. It was winter. Where was Joseph? He was in Liberty Jail, heartbroken over what the Saints were experiencing. He felt that he had been abandoned.

In that precarious circumstance, he received some of the most beautiful scripture—sections 121, 122, and 123 of the Doctrine and Covenants. They are significant. I hope you will read them. *Saints* has a short account of this event:

“Joseph cried out in behalf of the innocent saints. ‘Oh Lord,’ he pleaded, ‘how long shall they suffer these wrongs and unlawful oppressions, before thine heart shall be softened toward them?’

“‘My son, peace be unto thy soul,’ the Lord responded. ‘Thine adversity and thine affliction shall be but a small moment; and then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high; thou shall triumph over all thy foes.’

“The Lord assured Joseph that he was not forgotten. ‘If the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee,’ the Lord told Joseph, ‘know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience and shall be for thy good.’



“The Savior reminded Joseph that the Saints could not suffer more than He had. He loved them and could end their pain, but He chose instead to suffer affliction with them, carrying their grief and sorrow as part of His atoning sacrifice. Such suffering filled Him with mercy, giving Him power to succor and refine all who turned to Him in their trials. He urged Joseph to hold on and promised never to forsake Him.”

Elder Heber C. Kimball (1801–68) had thought that the justices of the Missouri Supreme Court were going to free Joseph, but they decided not to. Heber returned to Liberty Jail and, not allowed into the dungeon, called down to Joseph with the bad news.

Joseph was warm and friendly to him. “Be of good cheer,” he said. Then he instructed Heber to “get all the Saints away as fast as possible.”⁴

There's a lesson for you in that: be of good cheer regardless of your challenges. If certain things tempt you, get away from them. Rely on the Holy Ghost. The example of Joseph in Liberty Jail and the Saints fleeing from Missouri to Nauvoo are wonderful examples of strength and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

As an Apostle, I bear witness of Jesus Christ. I am a sure witness of His divinity. I want you to know that He guides and directs the Church in a way that will bless all of us. I testify to you that He lives. ■

To watch the full devotional, go to [devotionals.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://www.ChurchofJesusChrist.org/devotionals).

NOTES

1. These sources can be found at [history.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://www.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).
2. See Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball* (1945), 327.
3. See Russell M. Nelson, “As We Go Forward Together,” *Ensign*, Apr. 2018, 7.
4. See *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*, vol. 1, *The Standard of Truth, 1815–1846* (2018), 389–90; [saints.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://www.saints.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).

ABOVE: ILLUSTRATION BY DAN BURR; MIRACLE AT QUINCY, BY JULIE ROGERS; JOSEPH SMITH IN LIBERTY JAIL, BY GREG K. OLSEN